

Inclusive & Quality Education for Tribals: Case Study KISS (Odisha)

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Abstract

The 12th Plan highlighted Equity, Access & Excellence as the tripod of India's education policy. The RTE Act 2009 has ensured a high level of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER). However, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) present a dismal picture of the outcome dimensions of our schooling system. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) therefore, highlights the importance of quality as an important conjoint of universal access, as skill based education will ensure proper employment opportunity. Education is a major enabler for empowerment for all; and in particular for extremely vulnerable sections of the society like STs. The tribal students are handicapped multi-dimensionally, with education as a critical fault line. This paper analyses the policy initiatives to educate and empower them and brings out the bleak picture that bedevil this neglected segment. It contrasts the experience of Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) in terms of promoting gender parity, vocational training, health alleviation, dignity of the girl child and educational outcomes as compared to their counterparts in government and SC/ST schools. The paper also highlights the unique funding model of KISS and its potential for replication. Inclusive growth and quality can work how in hand. The paper strongly argues for government's handholding through "Skill India" initiative and funding unique initiatives as KISS.

Keywords: RTE ACT, GER, ASER, SDG, KISS, SKILL INDIA

INTRODUCTION

The tribals constitute 8% of India's population; and 22% of Odisha and are multi-dimensionally deprived even compared to the dalits. Being culturally distinct and spatially alienated, the dawn of independence witnessed a sharp difference in the policy approach towards them. Mr. Verrier Elwin pitched for isolation and for preserving their cultural identity, while Prof. G.S. Ghurye strongly argued for their integration to the mainstream. Sandwiched between such ideological positions, the Indian states took baby steps to ramp up the socio-economic conditions of the tribals. 70 years later, most of them remain trapped in the quagmire of poverty, illiteracy and indignity. Their displacement from land, deprivation from forest rights and exploitation by predatory MNCs, has in a sense triggered Maoist violence. The tribals seek justice through undemocratic methods and this is often repulsed with brutal police action. However in 1993, a definite initiative as KISS was taken through the imaginative foresight of Dr. Achyuta Samanta. KISS clearly underscores the importance of education as the true template of empowerment for the alienated, and has brought dignity to the girl child, and ushered in a template for credible promising future for the hapless tribal population.

This paper tries to examine (a) Varied dimensions of the tribal deprivation (b) Policy initiatives to bring equity and excellence for the tribals in the area of education (c) Impact of KISS to realize the objectives of equity, quality and dignity (d) The way forward for fusing quality with inclusion.

VARIED DIMENSIONS OF THE TRIBAL DEPRIVATION

Odisha is distinctive not only in terms of very high concentration of tribal population (22%). It hosts the largest number of tribal communities; (62 Scheduled Tribe communities including 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)) with each one different from each other. According to 2011 Census, the tribal population of the State was 95,90,756 constituting 22.85% of the total population of the State and 9.66% of the total tribal population of the country. Odisha has the third largest concentration of tribal population in the country.

The Human Development Index (HDI) of the tribals show that their condition continues to be much lower compared to the rest in terms of visible parameters like education, health, income, etc. The Scheduled Tribe population registered poverty rates significantly higher than the rest of the population. A comparative picture of the general category, vulnerable sections like SC & ST on different dimensions of deprivation in the table below bring out a distressing picture.

¹ Input received from Prof. S.N. Misra, Research Guide, Dean, School of Management & Director, School of Leadership, KIIT University, Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India.

Table-1: Comparative Picture of General Category, SC & ST

Category	% of Below Poverty Line	% of Literacy Rate	% of Dropout	% of No Access to Doctors & Clinic	% of Absence of Immunization	% of Absence of Safe Drinking Water
General	23	74.04	30	--	--	--
SC	41.5	66.10	49	15.6	42.2	43.2
ST	49.5	59.0	62.5	29	63.6	66.6

Source: Demographic Perspective on Indian Tribes, Arup Maharatna

It would be seen from the above that apart from nearly 50% of population below poverty line, the dropout percentage of scheduled tribes is abnormally high i.e. 62.5% as compared to 49% and 30% in case of scheduled caste and general. The scenario is also dismal in terms of access to doctors & clinic, immunization, safe drinking, are the critical parameters from healthy living environment which is a fundamental right under Article 21 of our Constitution.

POLICY INITIATIVES

The Constitution of India (Article 293) provides the criteria by which Indian citizens, can be classified by “ST” by the President of India. Article 15 & 16 provides special safeguards for them in the matter of entry into educational institutions & employment to government jobs. Schedule 5 & 6 delineate the special responsibility given to the Governor of states in the matter of law, order, economic development and preservation of special legal rights like PESA & Forest Rights. However, education holds the key to true empowerment. Accordingly the Kothari Commission (1966) emphasized the need for bolster of Science & Technology education and suggested for 6% allocation of GDP. A National Policy on Education (1982) emphasized the maxim of equal access to education of comparable quality to all. The neoliberal trends in education began with Ambani-Birla report (2000) which envisioned the creation of a knowledge based economic & society and use of pay policy supported by loan schemes and financial grants for economically backward section. The Sam Pitroda’s Knowledge Commission (2009) recommended expansion of the number of universities in the country autonomy of the universities to set student fee levels, commercial use of university facilities and private sector finance to attract not for profit private investment. The Narayan Murthy Report (2012) recommended autonomy in finance, regulatory, academic and administrative aspects, attracting funding, public private partnership and enabling environment for free movement of faculty and students to promote collaboration with world class institutions abroad. In other words the last decade has made a strong pitch for PPP, increasing privatizing and tie-up with foreign universities.

The draft national education policy (2016) envisions that a credible and high performing education system capable of ensuring inclusive quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all and producing students/graduates equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitude and values that are required to lead a productive life, participate in the country’s development process, respond to the requirements of the fast-changing, ever-globalizing, knowledge-based economy and society. In other words, the new policy combines inclusivity with quality to harness the opportunity available in the global market for skill based employment.

In this backdrop it would be interesting to analyze the initiatives taken by the varied government towards education of the tribals.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE FOR TRIBAL EDUCATION: ODISHA

Development of ST&SC in Odisha is a matter of special concern of the State government. There are 506 Sevashrams, 766 Ashram Schools, 164 boys high schools, out of which 14 have been upgraded to higher secondary schools in science & commerce stream, 173 girls high schools out of which 8 girls high schools have been up to higher secondary school.

According to the 12th plan the need to start a pre-matric scholarship for all ST children across country so that the drop out in transition from elementary to secondary is minimized. The scheme of vocational training centres for enabling them to be self employed. The post-matric scholarship scheme is a single intervention by the government of India for educational empowerment of tribal students, with the rate of scholarship and income ceiling to be revised. The following table would provide a flavor of these scholarships.

Table-2: Pre-Matric & Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme for ST & SC

Year	Pre-Matric Scholarship				Post-Matric Scholarship			
	Beneficiaries		Amount Released (Rs. in lakh)		Beneficiaries		Amount Released (Rs. in lakh)	
	ST	SC	ST	SC	ST	SC	ST	SC
2013-14	871378	625992	313.47	76.46	107813	129444	7781.00	9593.35
2014-15	863114	625590	33405.48	6811.56	37848	47992	3821.56	8248.67
2015-16	863114	625590	41928.64	4134.15	37848	47992	3821.56	8248.67

Source: SC&ST Development Department, Government of Odisha

However, there is a need to expand hostels for boys and specifically girl's hostel. Infrastructure facilities are very poor in most of the hostels, maintenance of the buildings is not up to the mark and construction of hostel building is often hampered due to non receipt of proper plan and fund from the states. Under the scheme of ashram schools the state governments are eligible for 100% central share for construction of all girls' ashram schools in naxal affected areas. The Rajiv Gandhi national fellowship scheme was launched in 2006 for financial assistance to ST students pursuing M.Phil and Ph.D. Entrepreneurship should be developed among tribal youths; one of the reasons for the tribal community being economically backward is because they lack the skill in business.

THE GENESIS AND IMPACT OF KISS ODISHA

It is to the credit of Dr. Achyuta Samanta that the doctrinaire approach of Elwin and Ghurye was eschewed in Odisha and the thrust was how to "Educate, Enable and Empower" the tribal children by mainstreaming them. Started with just 125 tribal students in 1993, Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) has today grown into the largest free residential institute for indigenous (tribal) children and provides holistic education from Kindergarten to Post Graduation (KG to PG), vocational training, food, accommodation, health care and all other basic necessities of life to 25,000 indigenous (tribal) children of the poorest of the poor background absolutely free. **Students are enrolled from 62 indigenous communities (tribes) of Odisha, of which 13 are classified as primitive.** To achieve the objective of empowering the students with requisite skill levels vocational training has been given primary thrust. Some of the major highlights of KISS are delineated below.

(a) Absence of Gender Discrimination

One of the central concerns of the Millennium Development Goals (1995) was to work towards absence of gender discrimination in the matters of schooling which was acute amongst many developing economics. The following table would highlight how KISS has achieved the above objective.

Table-3: Composition of KISS Students

Grade	Total	Boys	Girls	Percentage of Girls
School	19314	10100	7714	40
+2	2430	1019	1411	58
+3	1992	886	1106	56
PG	732	347	385	52
Professional Course	840	538	302	36
Total	25308	12890	10918	43

Source: KISS, Odisha

It would be seen that the gender ratio is 43% overall and more than 50% at the level of graduation and post graduation. Such balance is not discernible even amongst the general category.

(b) Educational Performance

It would be interesting to observe that the students from KISS invariably perform better than their counterparts in high school examination in the state board schools and SC&ST department high schools. Further, the overall educational performance of students in Commerce & Science streams under the council of higher secondary education shows a remarkable story of consistent achievement. The following table brings out the contrast succinctly.

Table-4: Comparative Picture of Educational Performance

Examination	State Run Schools			SC&ST Deptt. High Schools			KISS, Odisha		
	2013	2014	2015	2013	2014	2015	2013	2014	2015
HSE	84.7	84.25	82.56	88.00	96.37	95.27	100	100	100
CHSE (Science)	72.07	70.13	76.75	93.21	83.44	83.58	99.8	90.37	86.95
CHSE (Commerce)	68.10	64.14	69.48	94.53	86.70	81.34	99.8	99.56	96.96

Source: SC&ST Development Department, Government of Odisha & KISS

It would be seen that (a) the state run schools perform invariably less than KISS Odisha across the

spectrum and disciplines, and (b) performance in KISS is far better than the schools run by SC/ST department high schools. Further while the performance levels in SC/ST schools show a decelerating trend in the Commerce stream; it's shows a commendable trend in KISS.

(c) Vocational Training

Vocational training at KISS links education with productivity, economic development & individual prosperity. Every student undergoes vocational education in one of the 50 trades offered as per his or her talent. It is designed to impart necessary occupational skills among tribal students to mould them into successful entrepreneurs & make them fit in the job market. **A remarkable feature of implementation of this important component at KISS is that it enables the students to 'earn while they learn'**. It is redeeming to note that 1000 students are involved in painting. Sale proceeds from this activity exceed Rs.1/- crore, out of which Rs.25 lakh is surplus and each student manages to make Rs.700/- to Rs.1000/- per month. **On one hand, students are getting free education, and on the other, each child manages to earn upto Rs.1000/- per month, realizing the goal of 'earn while you learn'.**



(d) Health Alleviation

KISS has been able to address many of the social and health issues like child marriage, infant mortality and maternal mortality etc. Girls in the indigenous communities are generally married off at an early age. They have little or no knowledge about their bodies and healthy sexual and reproductive practices, leading to high maternal mortality and infant mortality in these communities. Since the girls pursue education at KISS they are free from the societal pressure of marrying at an early age. Secondly the girls are provided counseling and education on their sexual reproductive health and rights at KISS which enables the girls to have a better understanding of their own bodies and healthy sexual and reproductive practices. This in turn led to reduction of maternal mortality and infant mortality among them.

(e) Special Focus on Girl Child Education

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(f) Hunger & Health Alleviation

The greatest achievement has been the ability to provide three nutritious meals each day to all 20,000 students. Indigenous communities also have lower levels of awareness on health issues which is a major reason why children are subjected to many serious diseases and illnesses such as Kwashiorkor, Marasmus, Tuberculosis, hookworm and ringworm infestation to name a few. Malnutrition and under nutrition is highly prevalent among the children in these communities. Conditions like Kwashiorkor and Marasmus arise due to vitamin and protein deficiencies in the body. KISS ensures that the diet provided is enriched with vitamins, proteins, minerals and carbohydrates.

(g) Funding Model and Economics of KISS

The following table shows the trend of students, total expenditure at KISS.

Table-5: Trend of Students & Expenditure at KISS

Year	No. of student	Expenditure	Expenditure per Student Per Month
2009	10000	11.3	941.61
2011	15000	24.3	1340
2012	20000	33.2	1383
2013	20900	44.3	2119
2014	25000	50.0	--

Source: KISS, Odisha

The above expenditure per student in KISS i.e. around Rs.2000/- is way below the expenditure by students in private universities which is around Rs.50,000/- per month. Further KISS is run through cross subsidization from employees of KIIT sustains a unique experiment; instead of depending on government

subsidy. Every employee of KIIT contributes 3% of gross salary towards KISS. Any vendor or contractor who supplies to KIIT has to mandatorily contribute 2-3% of profits to KISS. Vocational products produced in KISS, as outcome of vocational training, fetch some money. Finally, there is the channel of pure charitable donations. These multiple methods are enough to sustain KISS and it works far better than public subsidies, through financing or even direct public provisioning. **Prof. Bibek Debroy, Member Niti Aayog who visited KISS, strongly suggests that such innovative method of funding should be replicated.**

THE WAY FORWARD

Post RTE Act, 2009, universal access to education in government primary school has become a reality. However, high dropout and low quality education bedevil the mainstream government schooling. It's therefore such a sharp relief that KISS Odisha has become a shining template of empowerment for the deprived tribal children. The Oslo Summit (2015) enjoined upon all developing countries to work towards quality and value based education. Clifford Geertz, an American anthropologist, had observed that democracy and development can be interlinked through the hyphen of empathy. Dr. Achyuta Samanta does not either carry the ideological baggage of Ghurye or the utopic ideas of Elwin. Yet in a very fundamental way he provides the bridge of empathy between democracy and development and seeks to assuage the embitterment Sri. Jaipal Singh conveyed, seventy years back when he said in the Constituent Assembly "as a Jungli and Adivasi, if there is any group of Indian people that has been disgracefully treated and neglected consistently, it is my people. The whole history of my people is one of continued exploitation, and dispossession by the non aboriginals; punctuated by rebellion and disorder". The tribal children have indeed got a messiah who provides wholesome education, dignity to the girl children and a credible hope to each child to have a means of livelihood even truly. The trust on vocational training would need to be supplemented by handholding of government through Skill India initiative. KISS is a definitive step towards inclusive quality education; and goes beyond the ideological slugfest of isolation and integration.



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